CHAUCER'S USE OF THE OCTOSYLLABIC VERSE IN THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS AND THE HOUSE OF FAME

Chaucer's predecessors had used a four-beat line that was the result of the combination of the French octosyllabic verse with the native English verse. This native form of verse was a non-syllabic one of four accents with a feminine rime most frequently, though a line of four accents with a masculine rime often occurs, and less frequently one of three accents with a masculine rime. The French form was an exact syllabic verse of eight syllables with either the masculine or feminine rime and with only one fixed accent which fell at the end of the verse. The combination which was evolved by Chaucer's predecessors was an iambic verse of four beats with either a masculine or feminine rime, but with less exactness than the French verse in the matter of syllables. Though Chaucer can not be credited with being the first to use this metre in English poetry, as is the case with the heroic measure, yet he has shown originality in the management of it. And a comparison of his metrical skill in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame* will show, I think, beyond question that he improved his technical powers until he was able to make his verse obey implicitly the guidance of his genius. A comparison of the *House of Fame* with the *Confessio Amantis* of Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, will show that Chaucer, even in his mature work, allowed himself licenses in this metre which Gower did not. But such a comparison will also show, I believe, that Chaucer used his licenses with artistic effects which were beyond the scope of Gower's more pedantic powers.

These licenses of Chaucer are classified by Schipper in his *Metrik* under four heads: (1) lack of first syllable or anacrusis, (2) double anacrusis and syllable slurring, (3) transposition of accent, (4) lack of syllable in the middle of the verse.[1] This classification includes most of the points to be considered in a study of the verse structure of the *Duchess*

[1] See Schipper, *Englische Metrik,* 1881, Vol. I, pages 281-2.

and the *Fame*, but I shall take them up under more detailed headings. There are also some roughnesses of style which must be discussed.

But in discussing the irregularities of these two poems there is one very great difficulty, that of getting a correct text. We must admit at the outset that our manuscripts are so poor in this part of Chaucer's work that our conclusions must be only tentative. The *Book of the Duchess* and the *House of Fame* are preserved in the same group of MSS. These MSS. have a common ancestor, designated as the "Oxford" and dated presumably about 1415. The "Oxford" was a composite, containing Lydgate and Hoccleve as well as Chaucer. "It had some manifest errors, such as the displacement of stanzas in the *Letter of Cupid*, the lost leaf in the *Book of the Duchess* and some faults in the *Parlement of Foules.*" Of the *Book of the Duchess* we have three MSS., the Fairfax, dated 1450, the Bodley and the Tanner, and one edition, Thynne's printed in 1532, all descended from the "Oxford." The immediate source of the Fairfax and the Bodley is designated as FB. The Tanner MS. is from another source, but it is "careless and unscrupulous." Thynne's edition is from still another source. Of the *House of Fame* we have three MSS., Fairfax, Bodley and Pepys, and two editions, Caxton's and Thynne's, all again going back to the "Oxford" as the ultimate source. The Fairfax and Bodley again are from the same immediate source. The Pepys, an incomplete MS., and Caxton's edition have a common source. Thynne's is a later edition which follows Caxton's.[2] As the Fairfax and Bodley MSS. have the *House of Fame* and some other poems which the Tanner has not, it is possible, that their source FB had access to some other source besides the "Oxford." Such close kinship of the MSS. precludes much feeling of security in any comparison of them, but still I believe the observations to be gained from such texts as we have are worthy of consideration. I have found it convenient to follow the text of the Globe Edition of the *Duchess* and the

[2] As authority for the foregoing statements, see Miss Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual*, 1908, pp. 333-9; *Globe Chaucer*, London, 1906, Introduction, p. xxxiii and p. xliv.

Fame with some changes where the variations in reading involve questions of metrical structure. These changes will appear as we proceed.

The first irregularity that demands our attention is the seven-syllable line, caused by the omission of the first syllable of the line or the anacrusis. There are in the *Duchess* 136 seven-syllable lines [3] in a total of 1333 lines, making a percentage of 10.2. A few examples will show beyond question that Chaucer intended the stress to fall upon the first foot of such a line:

I have so many an ydel thoght
Púrely for defaute of slepe — Du. 4-5

Al is y-liche good to me
Jóye or sorwe, wherso hit be — Du. 9-10

And who-so wiste al, bi my trouthe,
My sorwe, but he hadde routhe
And pite of my sorwes smerte,
Thát man hath a feendly herte. — Du. 590-593

'I not how ye mighte have do bet.'
'Bét? ne noght so wel!' quod he. — Du. 1043-4

'Now, by my trouthe, sir,' quod I,
Me thynketh ye have such a chaunce,
As shrift withoute repentaunce.'
'"Répentaunce!" nay fy!' quod he,
'Shúlde I now repente me
To love? nay certes, than were I wel
Wérs than was Achitofel, — Du. 1111-1117

In each of these examples the stress on the first syllable brings out the meaning emphatically and enlivens the rhythm. Though Skeat makes the statement that this line without

[3] Seven-syllable lines in the *Book of the Duchess*: 5, 10, 19, 20, 23, 45, 50, 61, 70, 74, 86, 97, 105, 112, 119, 133, 139, 144, 152, 159, 160, 164, 187, 225, 228, 229, 236, 241, 247, 258, 261, 262, 273, 286, 320, 340, 349, 357, 371, 374, 377, 380, 386, 405, 407, 444, 447, 448, 450, 464, 480, 482, 484, 488, 495, 498, 505, 509, 525, 528, 534, 538, 545, 562, 566, 587, 593, 632, 639, 652, 660, 690, 697, 699, 719, 728, 745, 752, 753, 758, 779, 783 789, 791, 795, 817, 818, 835, 849, 855, 919, 930, 939, 943, 949, 955, 966, 971, 980, 985, 996, 1016, 1044, 1052, 1065, 1067, 1070, 1072, 1088, 1091, 1098, 1114, 1115, 1117, 1120, 1128, 1140, 1173, 1182, 1194, 1197, 1208, 1209, 1253, 1275, 1277, 1278, 1290, 1297, 1298, 1312, 1314, 1316, 1319, 1323, 1325.

anacrusis is of frequent occurrence,[4] many of his emendations seem to be attempts to cure them. When such a small per cent can be got rid of in this way, it seems better to let them all stand as they are.

Closely connected with the seven-syllable line is the line which has a trochee in the first foot. This is a recognized substitution in the iambic measure. The effect produced by it is very much the same as the lack of anacrusis especially when the unaccented syllable of the foot happens to be a weak *e*. I may say here that in counting the number of seven-syllable lines I have refrained from counting the lines whose first words have a final weak *e*, even though in some cases such an *e* may have ceased to be felt as a syllable. Such lines have been, therefore, included in the class of the trochaic first foot, though it is of little consequence in which of these two classes they are placed. As example of the trochaic first foot, note the following and their effect:

Whéther my lord be quyke or deed.	Du. 121
Ráther than that I shulde deye.	Du. 240
Ráyed with gold and right wel cled.	Du. 252
Álle that on hir gan be-holde.	Du. 864
Wére my sorwes never so smerte.	Du. 1106

There are in the Duchess 24[5] instances of this trochaic first foot.

These same irregularities occur in the *House of Fame*, which is as certainly a production of Chaucer's maturity as the *Duchess* is of his immaturity. The comparison may prove suggestive as well as surprising. In the 2158 lines of the *Fame* there are 294 seven-syllable lines,[6] making a percent-

[4] See W. W. Skeat, *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Oxford, 1899, Vol. 3, p. 266, note on line 1098.

[5] Lines in the *Duchess* having a trochaic first foot: 33, 41, 79, 93, 100, 110, 121, 207, 240, 252, 288, 423, 434, 436, 574, 735, 755, 756, 763, 864, 945, 1106, 1133, 1160.

[6] Seven syllable lines in the *Fame*:
Bk. I: 3, 26, 35, 37, 40, 44, 58, 60, 75, 78, 86, 100, 105, 117, 123, 124, 125, 127, 133, 136, 146, 153, 154, 172, 173, 177, 179, 182, 190, 195, 201, 202, 206, 214, 215, 217, 218, 224, 226, 227, 228, 244, 254, 262, 271, 272, 276, 312, 313, 319, 323, 333, 340, 379, 399, 430, 446, 460, 465, 469, 488, 489;

age of 13.6. The number of trochees at the beginning of the line, however, in the *House of Fame* is only 17,[7] a much smaller proportion than there is in the *Duchess*.

In the second foot also Chaucer sometimes substitutes a trochee for an iambus. Ten Brink suggests that the occurrence of this license follows a sort of caesura after the first foot.[8] There are five examples of this trochaic second foot in the *Duchess* as follows:

Than pláy | eíther | at chess | or tables	Du. 51
Whyl mén | lóved | the law | of kinde	Du. 56
Cast úp, | áxed, | who clep|eth there?	Du. 185
This hért | rúsed | and stal | away	Du. 381
That thoú | nóldest | have tak|en me.	Du. 481.

Line 51 admits so easily of emendation that editors have

Bk. II: 17, 30, 31, 64, 66, 106, 121, 122, 133, 134 (omit *well* with F and B), 155, 169, 171, 181, 184, 188, 195, 214, 218, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 238, 246, 257, 259, 260, 262, 270, 289, 291, 292, 300, 303, 321, 325, 326, 329, 333, 335, 336, 338, 343, 391, 393, 408, 410, 412, 418, 422, 426, 431, 433, 444, 446, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 470, 485, 488, 495, 496, 498, 505, 517, 520, 521, 522, 523, 526, 546, 548, 550, 551, 558, 561, 570, 574;
Bk. III: 16, 27, 36, 49, 51, 62, 71, 72, 82, 84, 86, 94, 99, 104, 106, 109, 113, 115, 116, 118, 120, 128, 131, 140, 144, 148, 151, 162, 163, 164, 172, 176, 189, 191, 205, 211, 240, 241, 245, 280, 286, 311, 319, 320, 321, 323, 330, 331, 339, 342, 344, 348, 353, 357, 358, 365, 388, 390, 393, 416, 442, 451, 453, 462, 464, 465, 474, 476, 489, 497, 498, 503, 519, 557, 561, 571, 606, 616, 622, 623, 628, 633, 648, 663, 666, 671, 678, 685, 688, 696, 697, 714, 715, 734, 740, 746, 757, 761, 783, 791, 793, 803, 805, 808, 815, 841, 863, 867, 873, 894, 910, 919, 937, 946, 952, 959, 968, 975, 976, 979, 980, 981, 989, 991, 995, 1012, 1017, 1025, 1028, 1029, 1034, 1038, 1048, 1052, 1060, 1065, 1066, 1067.

Line 255, Bk. I, is according to the Globe text a line without anacrusis, but the editor has omitted *was* given by F and B which would make the line regular. Likewise, in l. 347, Bk. I, the editor has omitted *al* given by F and B which would make the line regular. Line 473, Bk. III, "Telle us what your cause may be" is in F MS. "Telle us what may your cause be."

[7] Lines in the *Fame* having a trochaic first foot:
Bk. I: 4, 155, 327.
Bk. II: 13, 532.
Bk. III: 146, 247, 315, 552, 828, 888, 896, 938, 977, 982, 1023, 1050.

[8] Ten Brink, *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, translated by M. Bentinck Smith, 1901, § 301.

not refrained from it. Ten Brink has put *playen* for *play* and makes the line run:

Than playen either at chess or tables.[9]

This makes the line regular with the exception of the permissible slurring of *er* before a vowel. Skeat and Heath, the Globe editor, have both adopted this easy emendation, but the Fairfax MS. has *play*. The other two MSS. do not contain lines 31-96, and even the Fairfax has them in a later hand. This only goes to show how careful we must be in drawing absolute conclusions. If this were the only case of the trochaic second foot, or if the other instances were as easily emended, I should be less inclined to believe that Chaucer intended to use a trochee in this place. But I see no reason to depart from the MS. evidence here, even though poor, when we must account for the phenomenon elsewhere. Three of these other examples from the *Duchess* are preterites in *ed*,[10] which was generally a stable inflectional syllable, as was also *est*, in *noldest*, the other example.[11] If these syllables are slurred the lines will have to be read as seven-syllable lines. Line 56 especially lends itself to such a reading, but it hardly seems justifiable to slur the *ed* in one case and not in the others.

The trochaic second foot in the *House of Fame* is slightly less numerous, occurring only three times, but these instances furnish indisputable evidence of the presence of the foot in this metre. They are:

As ít | fólkes | complex|iouns.	H. F. 21 (Bk. I)
And nów | hílles | and now | mountaines.	H. F. 898 (Bk. II, 390)
That thóu | súffrest | debon|airly.	H. F. 2013 (Bk. III, 923)

These cases are not easily emended, and furthermore a careful reading of these passages will show, I believe, that Chaucer gains an excellent effect from this variation. Particularly does the passage in Book II in which line 898 occurs sustain this view:

[9] Ten Brink, § 301.

[10] See Kittredge, *Observations on the Language of Chaucer's Troilus*, Chaucer Society, 1891, § 136 (d); ten Brink, § 259 (e).

[11] Kittredge, § 136 (b).

And I adoun gan loken tho,
And beheld feldes and plaines,
And now hilles, and now mountaines,
Now valeys, and now forestes
And now, unethes, grete bestes; H. F. 896-900
(Bk. II, 388-392)

The poet breaks the monotony of the description in this subtle way, and as his eye would dwell a little longer on one object than on another, so this effect is caught by the use of the trochee, *hilles.*

Another interesting license of Chaucer's use in the *Duchess* as compared with the *Fame* is the short foot after the caesura. In the *Duchess* there are according to the MSS. six cases. In most of these cases emendation has been resorted to by the editors, and to be sure it is remarkably easy.

In the lines 158-159,

Ne tree | ne nought | that | ought was,
Beste | ne man | ne | nought elles,

ten Brink has suggested that *nought* ought to be *nothing,* and the Globe editor and Skeat have followed this suggestion.

In line 547,

But cer|tes sir | if | that ye,

the Globe editor adds an *e* to *sir,* and Skeat inserts *good* before *sir.*

In line 733,

Was fals;— | which | a foole | she was,

Skeat inserts *A!* before *which.*

In line 1089,

I was | right yong | soth | to say,

Skeat inserts *the* before *soth.* Though the MSS. read *yonge* instead of *yong,* the editors omit the final *e* because the word is not grammatically entitled to it.

In line 1138,

What los | is that? | quod | I tho,

Skeat inserts *sir* after *that.* These are all very excellent emendations which commend themselves to our judgment of what the poet might have said, but have we the right to throw away entirely the evidence of the MSS.?

That this kind of license did not commend itself to Chaucer,

however, is evident from its absence in the *House of Fame*. The only apparent instances of it are in lines 2048 and 2049 (Bk. III, 958-959):

> That is bitid, late or now?
> 'No,' quod he, 'tel me what.'

Line 2048 is so confused in the MSS. and editions that it furnishes no reliable evidence. Upon consulting the MSS. on line 2049 we find that the Fairfax reads *telle* instead of *tel*, and so it can be classed as a trochaic foot. If we adopt this reading of the Fairfax, which is really the best MS., we find that, though the *Duchess* has six cases of the short foot after the caesura, the *House of Fame* has none at all. On this point ten Brink says: "The assertion that there is invariably an arsis between two stresses will seem untenable to an over-credulous reader of the 'Death of Blaunche' or the 'House of Fame' in their present form. But the extant versions of these poems in particular are corrupt to a degree such as, in the absence of more reliable and independent evidence, justifies a more radical criticism than the general condition of Chaucer's poems requires or warrants. Many passages call for incisive treatment, but even when dealing tentatively with others a memory of the prevailing characteristics of the poet will save the commentators from imputing to the author the sins of ignorant copyists."[12] But the fact that the occurrences of this phenomenon are to be found only in the earlier work would seem to indicate that they bear some relation to the development of the poet and are not to be set aside as mere mistakes of the copyists.

Closely connected with this short foot after the caesura is the trochee in the third foot. In this license the statistics show a different attitude of the poet. In the *Duchess* there are three cases of the trochee in the third foot as follows:

> She long|ed só | áfter | the king. Du. 83
> Right as | hit wás | wóned | to do. Du. 150

In this Skeat substitutes *wont* for *woned*, and then the line must be scanned as a seven-syllable line.

> That it| was shádwe | óver | all under. Du. 426

In the *House of Fame* there are the following cases:

[12] Ten Brink, p. 208, § 299, note.

Any why | th' efféct | fólweth | of somme.	H. F. 5 (Bk. I, 5)
Ech | aboúte | óther | goinge.	H. F. 799 (Bk. II, 291)
Caus|ed óf | óthres | steringe.	H. F. 800 (Bk. II, 292)
And with | this wórd | úpper | to sore.	H. F. 884 (Bk. II, 376)
And | behéld | féldes | and plaines.	H. F. 897 (Bk. II, 389)
And on | hir féet | wéxen | saw I.	H. F. 1391 (Bk. III, 301)
That dwell | in érthe | únder | the mone.	H. F. 1531 (Bk. III, 441)
That through | the wórld | wénte | the soun.	H. F. 1724 (Bk. III, 634)
'No,' | quod hé,' | télle | me what.	H. F. 2049 (Bk. III, 959)

We have then of the trochee in the third foot three instances in the *Duchess* and nine in the *House of Fame.*

There are four lines, one line in the *Duchees* and three in the *House of Fame,* which scan perfectly as three-beat lines:

Gan homward for to ryde.	Du. 1314
And fair Venus also.	H. F. 618 (Bk. II, 110)
A good persuasioun.	H. F. 872 (Bk. II, 364)
Me list nat do hit now.	H. F. 1821 (Bk. III, 731)

All the MSS. give these readings, but the small number of instances scarcely justifies the assumption that Chaucer allowed an occasional three-beat line in his four-beat verse. It may be that these are merely defective lines.

It seems that unquestionably in this metre, even if he did not in the heroic metre, Chaucer allowed an extra syllable before the caesura. I found 27 examples in the *Duchess.* Some of these may be explained away, but ingenuity, I believe, can not manage them all. I will give first those which for various reasons have been emended:

To do | hir erande || and he | come nere.	Du. 134

Ten Brink says *erande* can be slurred into a monosyllable,

because there was another Middle English form of this word, *ernde*.[13]

'Go bet,' | quod Juno || to Mor|pheus. Du. 136.

This ten Brink explains as the result of a gloss, and he would substitute *she* for *Juno*.

As did | the goddesse || quene Al|cyone. Du. 264

Skeat omits *quene*.

And saw noght, || 'Allas!' | quod she | for sorwe. Du. 213

Ten Brink [14] and Skeat substitute *A!* for *Allas!*

And I | herde going || bothe up | and down. Du. 348.

Skeat omits *bothe*.

For there | nis planete || in fir|mament. Du. 692

Skeat omits *for* at the beginning.

Had Dydo || the queene | eek of | Cartage. Du. 731

Skeat omits *the* before *queene*.

No man|er counseyl || but at | hir look. Du. 839

Skeat substitutes *reed* for *counseyl*.

And if | he tell hir || to say | right soth. Du. 1188

Skeat omits *right*.

But these emendations remove only nine cases. We still have left eighteen. Of these, nine of the extra syllables occur before vowels, but they are not cases where Chaucer usually allows a slurring.[15] The following are the eighteen lines in which no attempt at emendation has been made:

For sorwful || ymag|ynac|ioun. Du. 14
That certes, || I trowe | that ev|er-more. Du. 852
So whan | this lady || coude heere | no word. Du 101
And slep|e whyles || the day|es laste. Du. 177
Or som | wight elles | I ne rogh|te who. Du. 244
And hadde | y-gret hym || as I | best coude. Du. 516
My wit | is foly, || my day | is night. Du. 609
That thou | shalt hooly || with al | thy wit. Du. 750
I shal | right blythly || so God | me save. Du. 754
For hit | is redy || to cacche | and take. Du. 780

[13] Ten Brink, § 263.

[14] For ten Brink's explanation of these lines, see *The Language and Metre of Chaucer*, § 300.

[15] See Kittredge, §§ 130-143.

For why | I took hit || of so | yong age. Du. 792
Of stature, || and of | wel set | gladnesse. Du. 827
That certes, || I trowe | that ev|er-more. Du. 852
In skil|ful places || that ber|e charge. Du. 893
The sol|eyn fenix || of Ar|abye. Du. 981
Go hoodles || in-to | the dry|e se. Du. 1027
Of al | day after, || til hit | were eve. Du. 1104
To love! | nay, certes, || than were | I wel. Du. 1116

In the *House of Fame* on the other hand there are only three examples of the extra syllables before the caesura:

Why this | a fantom || why these | oracles H. F. 11 (Bk. I)

This ten Brink says has an extra *why* caught from the first half of the line by the scribe.[16]

I noot | but whoso || of these | miracles. H. F. 12 (Bk. I)

If it is permissible to slur the *o* of *whoso* before the *of*, the line is smoother and is removed from this classification. Perhaps this is the best way to take it.

That ther | come entryng || into | the halle. H. F. 1527 (Bk. III, 437)

Skeat changes *into*, the reading of all the MSS., to *in*.

This evidence of Chaucer's tending to give up the extra syllable in his octosyllabic verse may add some weight to the argument that he did not permit it at all in his heroic verse. I have not counted as extra syllables cases of *ed* in the preterite and past participle, for Chaucer seems sometimes to allow these to be slurred even before a consonant.[17] Nor have I taken into account the final *e*, for the discussion of that question seemed beyond the scope of this paper.

Though an extra syllable sometimes occurs elsewhere in the verse than before the caesura, it can be explained as a slurring, even if in some cases it is a slur which is unusual. In making up my statistics on this point I have, of course, left out of consideration such slurs as are usually expected, as *many a*, etc. Most of the other cases are the occurrences of *ever* and *never* before consonants. Of these there are 22 ex-

[16] See ten Brink, § 300, Note.

[17] See Kittredge, § 136 (d).

amples in the *Duchess*. But *ever* and *never* sometimes count for a single syllable even in so late a work as the Troilus.[18] The other examples in the *Duchess* are the following:

And yet | me list || right *evel* | to playe.	Du. 239
Of *Paris,* | Eleyne || and of | Lavyne.	Du. 331
Long|e tyme; || and so | *at the* laste.	Du. 380

Skeat omits *so* in this line, the Globe editor omits *and*. But these emendations seem purely arbitrary to avoid the slurring.

But hit | may never || the *rather* | be do.	Du. 561
And *Phyllis* | also || for Dem|ophon.	Du. 727
But *whether* | she knew || or knew | it noght.	Du. 885

Line 659,

And mate *in the* mid point *of the* chekkere,

is a line which requires double slurring to make it scan at all, and it is probable that it is too corrupt for us to do anything with it.

There are then six cases of the extra syllable which necessitate unprecedented slurring, but they are all easily managed in that way and are not essential syllables as are most of the extra syllables before the caesura.

That Chaucer had learned to master this difficulty of slurring, so productive of roughness in the *Duchess*, by the time he wrote the *House of Fame* is evident from his avoidance of it there. In the *House of Fame* all slurring is much less frequent. There are only three cases of *ever* or *never* slurred before consonants: *nevertheless,* line 620 (Bk. II, 112); *never so,* line 740 (Bk. II, 232); *never so,* line 2103 (Bk. III, 1013). There are besides these, three cases of unprecedented slurring:

Of estats | and eek | of re|giouns.	H. F. 1970 (Bk. III, 880)

Skeat says, "the *e* in *estats* is very light, hence modern English *state.*" [19]

Wyth the non|es || that | thou wolt || do so.	H. F. 2099 (Bk. III, 1009)
For al | mot out || *other* late | or rathe.	H. F. 2139 (Bk. III, 1049)

The occurrence of hiatus where elision would regularly

[18] See Kittredge, § 90.

[19] Skeat, *Oxford Chaucer,* Vol. 3, p. 285, note on line 1970.

take place is a roughness that needs to be considered. Elision of weak *e* regularly takes place before a vowel and often before *h*,[20] except in the case of the definite article. Also we expect close *e* in *me, he, she, ne* (neque) to elide before a vowel except when the word which follows is a monosyllable.[21] Of this hiatus where elision would be expected I have found in the *Duchess* 25 examples,[22] making its occurrence in proportion to the number of lines 1.8 per cent. In the *House of Fame* I found 28 examples,[23] making 1.2 per cent. Though there is little difference in the percentage of hiatus in the two poems, the roughness in the lines where it occurs in the *Duchess* is more apparent than in the *House of Fame.*

In considering the two poems then we have deduced these facts. First, we have a much greater percentage of seven-syllable lines in the *House of Fame.* As to Chaucer's use of the trochee we have found that he allows it in both poems in any of the first three feet of the verse. Though in the *Fame* the trochaic third foot is of slightly more frequent occurrence than it is in the *Duchess,* the trochee when considered generally is more frequent in the *Duchess.* Of the extra syllables before the caesura there are only one-sixth as many in the *Fame* as there are in the *Duchess.* The violent slurrings are also greatly reduced in the *Fame* and unexpected hiatus is less common. Thus there is a noticeable decrease in the later work of all the irregularities we have considered except the seven-syllable lines. The great increase of the seven-syllable lines in the *Fame* makes it evident that Chaucer did not consider them a blemish upon his verse. Indeed, his own humorous

[20] Ten Brink, § 270; Kittredge, §§ 125-128.

[21] See Kittredge, § 129, I, and Note 2.

[22] Hiatus where elison would regularly be expected occurs in the following lines in the Duchess: 36, 41, 65, 73, 92, 99, 130, 272, 366, 396, 502, 547, 639, 739, 823, 836, 858 (?), 862, (either hiatus or trochee in first foot), 972, 1075, 1095, 1123, 1213, 1247, 1296.

[23] Hiatus where elison would regularly be expected occurs in the following lines in the *House of Fame*:
Bk. I: 49, 225, 381, 382, 410;
Bk. II: 8, 40, 56, 80, 396, 541;
Bk. III: 78, 324, 354, 459, 621, 651, 652, 686, 701, 795, 802, 807, 811, 814, 951, 966, 1016 (double hiatus).

words spoken in the full confidence of his poetic skill, may refer to this point:

> Nat that I wilne, for maistrye
> Here art poetical be shewed;
> But, for the rym is light and lewed,
> Yit, make hit sumwhat agreeable,
> Thogh som vers faile in a sillable;
> And that I do no diligence,
> To shewe craft, but o sentence. H. F. 1094-1100
> (Bk. III, 4-10)

He knew now there was no conflict between the form and the substance. In the conscious mastery of this form of verse he could speak humorously of being interested only in the substance it conveyed. The seven-syllable line, therefore, is not due to immaturity or crudeness on Chaucer's part. If there seems harshness in the *Duchess,* it is due to the roughnesses which have been mentioned and to his unskilful management of the pauses.

The pauses are managed with much better effect in the *House of Fame,* as the following passage shows:

> And I adoun gan loken tho,
> And beheld feldes and plaines,
> And now hilles, and now mountaines,
> Now valeys, and now forestes,
> And now unethes grete bestes;
> Now ryveres, now citees,
> Now tounes, and now grete trees,
> Now shippes seyllynge in the see. H. F. 896-903
> (Bk. II, 388-395)

This is a very effective passage illustrative of several of Chaucer's licenses—the lack of anacrusis in lines 897, 899 and 901, the trochee in the third foot in line 897, and the trochee in the second foot in line 898. The smoothness of the passage in spite of this variety in the metre is due to the harmonious distribution of the pauses and the sentence stress.

The distribution of the pauses and the sentence-stress is especially important in run-on lines [24]—lines where a clause beginning in one line runs over into the next. In the *Duchess* the run-on lines are more abrupt than in the *House of Fame.* It often happens that a line is broken by a decided pause, and

[24] For a full discussion of run-on lines, see ten Brink, §§ 317-320.

the latter half of the line is closely connected with the next line. This practice is productive of much roughness in the *Duchess;* for example:

> And I ne may, no night ne morwe
> Slepe; and this melancholye, etc. Du. 22-23

We have here too close connection between the two lines, for there is rather heavy stress upon the last word of the first line and the first word of the second. In addition to this there is a decided pause after the first foot, *slepe,* of the second line. Another instance of this putting two heavy stresses close together may be found in the *Duchess,* lines 34-5:

> My selven can not telle why
> The sothe; but trewely, as I gesse, etc.

Lines 78 and 79 of the *Duchess* show the same heavy stress at the end of one line and at the beginning of the next and a considerable break immediately after the stress in the last line:

> Hath wonder that the king ne come
> Hoom, for it was a longe terme.

In the *House of Fame* Chaucer succeeds in avoiding such complete pauses in the interior of a line and manages the stress in such a way that it is carried over farther into the second line, as in the following:

> And gan him tellen, anoon right,
> The same that to him was told. H. F. 2062-3
> (Bk. III, 972-3)
>
> And somtyme saw I ther, at ones,
> A lesyng and a sad soth-sawe. H. F. 2088-89
> (Bk. III, 998-9)

Idiomatic dialogue which is exceedingly difficult to handle in verse, Chaucer managed rather awkwardly in the *Duchess* as compared with his great skill in the *House of Fame.* In the *Duchess* we have such unmelodious lines as these:

> This god of slepe, with his own ýe
> Cast up, axed, 'who clepeth there?'
> 'Hit am I,' quod this messagere. Du. 184-6
>
> With that hir eyen up she casteth
> And saw noght. 'Allas!' quod she for sorwe. Du. 212-13

Compare with these such lines as the following in the *House of Fame*:

> And with this word upper to sore
> He gan, and seyde, 'By Seynt Jame!
> Now will we speken al of game.
> How farest thou?' quod he to me.
> 'Wel,' quod I. 'Now, see,' quod he,
> 'By thy trouthe, yond adoun,
> Wher that thou knowest any toun, etc. H. F. 884-890
> (Bk. II, 376-382)

Especially well done is the extended dialogue between Chaucer and the eagle toward the end of Book II.[25]

From the foregoing evidence we must admit, I think, that Chaucer was a much more skilful metricist when he wrote the *House of Fame* than when he wrote the *Duchess.* But the question may naturally arise, does he use the octosyllabic verse with as much skill even in the *House of Fame* as that form of metre will admit. We can best answer this question by making a comparison of Chaucer's work with the work of some other Middle English poet in the same metre. For this comparison I have selected the *Confessio Amantis* of Chaucer's contemporary and friend, John Gower. Gower had previously written his *Speculum Meditantis* and his *Vox Clamantis,* the one in French, the other in Latin, both exact syllabic verse-forms. So when he came to write English verse he naturally paid close attention to the syllables, making them conform carefully to the regular requirements of the verse. If regularity be the aim in this verse, then Gower has nearly reached perfection, for he is remarkable for his freedom from almost all the licenses of which Chaucer availed himself. It is too much to say, however, that Gower allowed himself no licenses. In order to determine this matter I have made a study of 3500 lines of the *Confessio Amantis,* about the same number of lines as are found in the *Duchess* and the *House of Fame* combined. I have used Mr. G. C. Macaulay's edition of Gower as a basis for this study, and I have made the same classifications that I used for Chaucer's licenses.

Of the 3500 lines there are three apparent seven-syllable lines, as follows:

> This | new sect | of Lol|lardie. Prol. 349
> Goth | into | France | for pleigne. Prol. 747

[25] *House of Fame,* 991-1088.

Ther | wist non | what o|ther mente. Prol. 1024

Of these three cases two can be remedied by the addition of a final *e* where it is grammatically needed. In line 349 *new* is entitled to a final *e* and the line may read:

This new|e sect | of Lol|lardie

In line 1024 *wist* is a weak preterite and entitled to the final *e*:

Ther wis|te non | what o|ther mente.

As line 747 stands, it not only lacks the anacrusis but has a trochee in the third foot. In view of Gower's almost invariable smoothness of metre, it seems reasonable to assume that this rough line is the result of a scribal omission of *to* before the infinitive *pleigne,* and that the line should read:

Goth in|to Franc|e for | to pleigne.

Of the trochaic first foot in the 3500 lines there are twenty-one examples, confined to *after,* occurring thirteen times; *under,* seven times; and *over,* once. Of the trochee in the second foot, the examples are confined to *after* and *under,* each occurring twice, so four in all. Of the short foot after the caesura I found no example. Of the trochee in the third foot I found the usage confined to *after* and *under,* four examples of each, eight in all. It may be that Gower meant to shift the accent on these prepositions. Of the extra syllable before the caesura I found none. Of the unusual slurs there were none, all were perfectly legitimate. Of hiatus where, according to Chaucer's practice in the *Troilus,* we should expect elision, I found only one example.

From these statistics it will be noticed that Gower almost never uses the seven-syllable line; that though he allows an occasional trochee in any of the first three feet, it is confined to three prepositions; that he never uses an extra syllable before the caesura, nor a short foot after it; that he has no violent slurrings and almost no cases of unexpected hiatus. Upon a lazy or an idle reader Gower's smoothness and regularity may have a pleasing effect, but upon a reader who comes to his author for mental stimulation, Gower will soon pall. As one reads the *Confessio Amantis* page after page, Gower's virtue becomes a vice. It makes one long for the freedom and variety which Chaucer allows himself, and by means of which he

keeps his reader always alert. There is fine art in Chaucer's octosyllabic verse, there is a variety and charm, a vivacity and energy which are unknown to Gower. Gower is simply a skilful metricist, Chaucer is an artist in verse. Gower is a man of talent, Chaucer is after all a man of genius.

So in this triple comparison we have in the *Duchess* on the one hand the young poet of genius, crude in his technique. In the *Confessio Amantis* of Gower we have the mediocre poet of facile workmanship. In the *House of Fame* we have the mature poet of genius showing his power not only in the thought but also in his technique.

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